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AUTHOR Gadzella, Bernadette M.; And Others
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ABSTRACT

All human beings experience stress at some time. Some stressors help us to achieve goals and experience successes in life. Other stressors are detrimental as they inhibit performance and affect health. This study investigated the differences among college students (N=530) who reported their stress levels as mild (N=90), moderate (N=374), or severe (N=66). Differences between men and women as well as among marital status groups (married, single or divorced) were examined. The Student-Life Stress Inventory (Gadzella, 1991), consists of 51 items grouped under 9 sections as stressors (frustrations, conflicts, pressures, changes, and self-imposed) and reactions to stress (physiological, emotional, behavioral, and cognitive). Data showed significant differences among the stress level groups with the severe level group reporting the highest scores. Women were significantly higher than men on two stressors--pressures and self-imposed, and on three reactions to stress--physiological, emotional, and behavioral. Differences were found among the marital status groups on two stressors--frustrations and self-imposed, and two reactions to stress--physiological and cognitive. In each case the divorced subjects reported higher scores. These findings should help students to better understand themselves and to try to adjust to the stressful situations. (ABL)

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STUDENTS' STRESSORS AND REACTIONS TO STRESS

BERNADETTE M. GADZELLA, HARRY L. FULLWOOD

AND MARYJANE TOMCALA

Department of Psychology and Special Education

East Texas State University

Commerce, Texas 75429

Presented at

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STUDENTS' STRESSORS AND REACTIONS TO STRESS

ABSTRACT

This study investigated the differences (a) among students who indicated their stress levels as mild, moderate, and severe, (b) between men and women, and (c) among marital status groups (married, single, and divorced). There were 530 students who participated in this study. The instrument used was the Student-Life Stress Inventory (Gadzella, 1991) which consist of 51 items grouped under nine sections as (a) stressors: frustrations, conflicts, pressures, changes, and self-imposed and (b) reactions to stress: physiological, emotional, behavioral, and cognitive. The subjects reported their responses on a 5-point Likert scale with 1 = never, 2 = seldom, 3 = ocassionally, 4 = often, and 5 = most of the time. Data showed significant differences among the stress level groups with the severe level group reporting the highest scores. Women reported significantly higher than men on (a) two stressors: pressures and self-imposed and (b) three reactions to stress: physiological, emotional, and behavioral. Differences were found among the marital status groups on (a) two stressors: frustrations and self-imposed and (b) two reactions to stress: physiological and cognitive. In each case the divorced subjects reported higher scores.

INTRODUCTION

All human beings experience stress at some time. Some stressors help us to achieve our goals and experience successes in life. Other stressors are detrimental as they inhibit our performances and affect our health. Understanding our stressors and reactions and the strategies we use to cope with them may help us to understand ourselves, adjust to our environment and live healthier lives.

Researchers (Gadzella, Ginther, Tomcala, & Bryant, 1991; McWilliams & Schnorr, 1986) have reported the stressors and the coping strategies that are used by various professionals. Other researchers (DeLongis, Folkman & Lazarus, 1988) studied daily hassles and uplifts and the impact these stressors have on health and mood. Recently, Gadzella, Fullwood and Ginther (1991) analyzed data collected from an instrument, Students-Life Stress Inventory (Gadzella, 1991), to determine its reliability. In another study, Gadzella and Fullwood (1992) (using the Student-Life Stress Inventory) investigated students' stress for four age groups and for the genders in the four age groups. The purposes of the present study was to determine if there are differences (a) among students who reported experiencing mild, moderate, and severe stress, (b) between men and women, and (c) among marital status (married, single, and divorced) groups on the stressors they experience, their reactions to the stressors, and coping strategies they use.

METHOD

There were 530 students enrolled in various courses at a state university, who participated in this study. In this group, there were 190 men and 340 women who reported their stress levels as mild (n = 90), moderate (n = 374), and severe (n = 66). Of this group, there were 190 married, 308 single, and 32 divorced students.

The Student-Life Stress Inventory (Gadzella, 1991) was the instrument used to collect the data. This inventory consists of 51 items grouped into nine sections as (a) stressors: frustrations (daily hassles, failure, lack of sources), conflicts, (with desirables and undesirables), pressures (deadlines, overload, and interpersonal relationships), changes (unpleasant, too many), and self-imposed (competitiveness, worrying, procrastination) and (b) reactions to stressors: physiological nervousness, ulcers, headaches, exhaustion), emotional (fear, anxiety, anger, guilt, depression), behavioral (crying, abusing self and/or others, smoking, attempting suicide, separating oneself from others), and cognitive (analyzing the stressful situations and the strategies used in coping with stress). Subjects rated each of the items in the inventory by using a 5-point Likert scale in which 1 = never, 2 = seldom, 3 = occasionally, 4 = often, and 5 = most of the time. The data were entered into the computer. Analyses of variance were computed for each of the nine sections of the inventory for stress levels, gender, and marital status groups. Newman-Keuls post-t tests were computed for all significant F-ratios.

RESULTS

The means, standard deviations, and F-ratios for the stress levels groups on stressors are reported in Table 1 and for reactions to the stressors in Table 2. The results for (a) stressors were: frustrations, $F = 35.55$, $p < .0000$; conflicts, $F = 6.61$, $p < .0015$; pressures, $F = 66.29$, $p < .0000$; changes, $F = 13.61$, $p < .0000$; and self-imposed, $F = 17.70$, $p < .0000$) and (b) reactions to the stressors were: physiological, $F = 34.99$, $< .0000$; emotional, $F = 26.31$, $p < .0000$; behavioral, $F = 20.41$, $p < .0000$; and cognitive, $F = 5.63$, $p < .0038$. Differences were found between the stress levels groups in each of these sections, with the severe group reporting the most stress.

The means, standard deviations, and significant F-ratios for men and women on stressors and reactions to stressors are presented in Table 3. The results were for (a) stressors: frustrations, $F = 14.69$, $p < .0001$; and self-imposed, $F = 7.63$, $p < .0051$; and (b) reactions to stressors: physiological, $F = 35.90$, $p < .0000$; emotional, $F = 25.27$, $p < .0000$; and behavioral, $F = 19.01$, $p < .0000$. Women reported higher scores than the men.

The means, standard deviations, and significant F-ratios for the marital status groups on stressors and reactions to stressors are presented in Table 4. The results were for (a) stressors: frustrations, $F = 9.76$, $p < .0001$; and self-imposed, $F = 3.28$, $p < .0384$ and (b) reactions to stress: physiological, $F = 4.71$, $p < .0093$; and cognitive, $F = 4.32$, $p < .0138$. Differences were found primarily between married and single groups with the divorced group, respectively.

DISCUSSION

The data shows that there were significant differences among the students who reported experiencing mild, moderate, and severe stress on all five types of stressors and four reactions of stress studied. It would be expected that the severe stress group would experience more stress than the mild and moderate. Thus, indicating the instrument is a valid one in collecting these data. On the stressors and reactions to stress where significant differences were found between the gender groups, women consistently reported more stress and reactions to stress than did the men. The data also showed that divorced students report having greater stress and reactions to stress than the married or single groups.

The findings in this study should help students to better understand themselves and try to adjust to the stressful situations. The findings should also assist instructors, who teach the students, to understand their students and assist them to adjust to the stressful situations.

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TABLE 1

Means, Standard Deviations, and F-ratios For Five (Stressor) Sections of the Student-Life Stress Inventory For Stress Levels Groups: Mild (n = 90), Moderate (n = 374), Severe (n = 66)

Section	Group	M	SD	F-ratio	p
Frustrations	Mild	15.13	3.87	35.55	.0000*
	Moderate	18.16	4.01		
	Severe	20.33	4.55		
Conflicts	Mild	7.92	2.22	6.61	.0015*
	Moderate	9.15	5.39		
	Severe	11.21	9.77		
Pressures	Mild	11.52	3.02	66.29	.0000*
	Moderate	14.29	2.95		
	Severe	16.89	2.54		
Changes	Mild	6.44	2.51	13.61	.0000*
	Moderate	8.75	5.57		
	Severe	11.09	7.86		
Self-imposed	Mild	19.72	3.79	17.70	.0000*
	Moderate	22.06	3.83		
	Severe	23.09	3.98		

*p < .05

TABLE 2

Means, Standard Deviations, and F-ratios For Four (Reactions to Stress) Sections of the Student-Life Inventory For Stress Level Groups: Mild (n = 90), Moderate (n = 374), Severe (n = 66)

Section	Group	M	SD	F-ratio	p
Physiological	Mild	26.61	6.92	34.99	.0000*
	Moderate	33.02	8.81		
	Severe	38.12	10.20		
Emotional	Mild	10.47	3.32	26.31	.0000*
	Moderate	13.07	3.70		
	Severe	14.50	3.93		
Behavioral	Mild	16.24	4.42	20.41	.0000*
	Moderate	18.73	4.84		
	Severe	21.36	6.27		
Cognitive	Mild	5.83	1.96	5.63	.0038*
	Moderate	6.34	1.93		
	Severe	6.87	1.97		

*p < .05

TABLE 3

Means, Standard Deviations, and F-rtaios For Two (Stressors) and Three (Reactions to Stress) Sections of the Student_life Stress Inventory For Men (n = 190) and Women (n = 340)

Section	Group	M	SD	F-ratio	p
Pressures	Men	13.43	2.91	14.69	.0001*
	Women	14.54	3.37		
Self-imposed	Men	21.16	3.84	7.63	.0051*
	Women	22.14	4.00		
Physiological	Men	29.45	8.77	35.90	.0000*
	Women	34.31	9.06		
Emotional	Men	11.71	3.48	25.27	.0000*
	Women	13.42	3.90		
Behavioral	Men	17.35	4.79	19.01	.0000*
	Women	19.35	5.21		

*p < .05

TABLE 4

Means, Standard Deviations, and F-ratios For Two (Stressors) and Two (Reactions to Stress) Sections of the Student-Life Stress Inventory For Marital Status Groups: Married (n = 190), Single (n = 308), and Divorced N = 32)

Section	Group	M	SD	F-ratio	p
Frustrations	Married	17.51	4.32	9.76	.0001*
	Single	17.84	4.15		
	Divorced	21.06	4.48		
Self-imposed	Married	21.25	4.03	3.28	.0384*
	Single	22.16	3.92		
	Divorced	21.41	3.75		
Physiological	Married	32.62	9.51	4.71	.0093*
	Single	32.05	8.76		
	Divorced	37.28	11.05		
Cognitive	Married	6.65	1.95	4.32	.0138*
	Single	6.13	1.92		
	Divorced	6.31	2.02		

*p < .05